

Broadband USA Applications Database

Applicant Name: MIDDLE RIO GRANDE DEVELOPMENT FOUNDATION, INC.

Project Title: RuMBA Coalition – South Texas, Eagle Pass Independent School District Public Computer Center (PCC) Project

Project Type: Public Computer Center

Executive Summary

The RuMBA Coalition – South Texas, Eagle Pass ISD Public Computer Center is designed to create a next generation learning environment which will help prepare students, job seekers and other members of the community for the 21st Century Workplace. Through the deployment of an integrated system of state-of-the-art laptops, workstations and multi-media presentation tools, such as an interactive Promethean board, an Avermedia documentation camera, and video projector, the Public Computer Center project is viewed as a vital component of a comprehensive educational plan being implemented within Maverick County, Texas.

The umbrella Broadband Coalition, which includes the prime applicant, the Middle Rio Grande Development Council, co-applicant, Eagle Pass Independent School District (EPISD) as well as the Southwest Junior College of Texas, is an initiative of the Rural Mobile & Broadband Alliance (RuMBA) USA. The coalition ensures that multiple community anchor institutions, as well as the Kickapoo Traditional Tribe of Texas, work in concert to develop the area's Broadband capacity, pursuant to the American Recovery and Reinvestment Act (ARRA) of 2009. The Public Computer Center would be the focal point in providing computer and Internet training to the general public. Another Coalition partner, INOSS, will work with a volunteer organization, NetLiteracy, to provide limited weekend opening hours.

The Middle Rio Grande Development Council (MRGDC) is a council of governments whose principal mission is to accelerate the economic development of the Middle Rio Grande region, in south Texas, covering 9 rural counties. The MRGDC and its co-applicant, the Eagle Pass Independent School District (EPISD), have recognized that one of the obstacles to furthering educational outreach, computer literacy, and jobs creation is the lack of funds to create a Public Computer Center in a strategic location for the public's benefit. Both the MRGDC and EPISD annually receive a multitude of funds for the projects under their mission and goals. However, the funds are restricted to the operation of their earmarked programs and can not be used for a general purpose and public access facility. Furthermore, the property-poor school district, the largest in the Middle Rio

Grande border region, does not raise through its local ad valorem taxes, or the state funding, sufficient funds to develop the proposed Public Computer Center.

As an economic development district the primary applicant, MRGDC, as designated by the U.S. Department of Commerce, has included technology enhancements and Public Computer Center projects within its strategic goals under its Comprehensive Economic Development Strategies for the 9- county rural region. The MRGDC is serving as a fiscal pass-through entity to enable all the RuMBA Coalition – South Texas partners to use its available in-kind and financial resources to ensure this project's success.

The coalition partnership between the MRGDC, the Eagle Pass Independent School District (EPISD), the Kickapoo Traditional Tribe of Texas, the Southwest Texas Junior College (SWTJC), Rural Mobile & Broadband Alliance (RuMBA) USA, Inc. and INOSS, Inc. with Net Literacy, ensures the implementation of this PCC development. The project will improve the literacy and educational levels of the targeted area as well as create an economic improvement in the region through the creation of direct, indirect and induced jobs. Hundreds of jobs would be created, should BTOP select our Proposal for funding.

Eagle Pass Independent School District (EPISD) boundaries parallel that of Maverick County near the Texas-Mexican border. Eagle Pass, Texas, is one of the most impoverished border towns in the US, with severe shortage of opportunities to access computer technology and high-speed Internet. The EPISD seeks to address the current lack of facilities, and technology hardware equipment, by providing a venue for a public computer center. The goal of the Center is to provide opportunities for training and to build capacity for the public in general.

EPISD is responding to the needs of the community, in consultation with key partners within the RuMBA Coalition – South Texas, by proposing to build a 10,000 square foot Public Computer Center, a broadband-enabled facility containing 41 workstations and 20 laptops.

The most distinguishing characteristic of the Texas Border and its communities' economy is the crushing poverty relative to U.S. national and state averages. Much of the Border region is economically distressed. More than a quarter of the Border counties, or 11 of 43, fell into the poorest 1 percent of all counties in the U.S., with per-capita incomes of less than \$10,840. The region contains three of the nation's poorest counties: Maverick, Starr, and Zavala. Twenty-two of the 43 counties, more than half, ranked in the poorest 10 percent of all counties with per-

capita personal income of less than \$13,914. At the other end of the scale, the Border region did not have a single county ranked in the top 10 percent of the nation's income distribution.

In 2004, the Texas Supreme Court ruled unanimously that the state's system for financing public schools was unconstitutional because of "glaring disparities" between what rich and poor school districts spend on education.

Eagle Pass School District is considered a property tax poor district. As such, it depends on state funding formula grants to help cover the most basic of costs needed to provide an equitable level of education for students in the district. The status as a property tax poor district also makes it dependent on federal grant programs to help meet its costs associated with campus instructional and personnel needs.

The EPISD includes 22 schools that serve 13,877 students in grades PK-12, including students from the neighboring reservation, home to the Kickapoo Traditional Tribe of Texas. The District spends \$7,647 per pupil in current expenditures. The District spends 61% on instruction, 32% on support services, and 7% on other elementary and secondary expenditures.

The EPISD has 16 students for every full-time equivalent teacher. The Texas state average is 14 students per full-time equivalent teacher. The EPISD had a grades 9-12 dropout rate of 5% in 2008. The national grades 9-12 dropout rate in 2008 was 3.9%. The creation of a Public Computer Center would allow students the opportunity to recover credits for potential dropouts.

With regard to the served people from the Kickapoo Reservation, the dropout rate among Kickapoo students has, historically, been as high as 96 percent. Formal education has never been a tradition of any Native American culture and, historically, Native American students have been behind academically. Since the opening of the Kickapoo Casino it was possible for more Kickapoo children to regularly attend school. In 2009, the first student from the tribe earned a college degree and has returned to work in tribal administration, with 17 more attending college at present. The Kickapoos have shown a tremendous propensity to embrace education when opportunities are offered. The Tribe was the first Native American school to earn Texas School Ready! (TSR) Project certification, the first time in history that a tribal-based early childhood center has achieved certification of any kind.